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ECONOMIC DETERMINISM:

PROBLEMS IN THE THEORY OF SOCIAL FORMATIONS

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Economic Determinism: Problems in the Theory of Social Formations, submitted by Jean-Claude Saint-Onge in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

...un dieu quelque'en soit la
griffe, est toujours en train
de faire son nid dans les
plumes de la surabondance,
c'est-à-dire de la "transcenden-
dance" du "concret" et de la
"vie" ...

L. Althusser

And I cannot exempt many of
the more recent "Marxists"
from this reproach, for the
most amazing rubbish has been
produced in this quarter too.

F. Engels

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NOTE

We wish to notify the reader that we are responsible for all the translations in the thesis. Whenever we felt that the French versions of Marx's works were more accurate we freely translated from those. Sometimes we simply used the available English translation and changed a word, or group of words, e.g., the Preface of Capital talks of "individuals...as embodiments of class-relations" (p. 10): the word "embodiments", was replaced by "bearers", which corresponds exactly to the inspiration of the German original "träger", which in the French version is translated accurately by the word "supports" (see below, p. 20).

We shall see that in so far as there is here a question of any philosophical interest, it resolves itself into the more general question of methodology in the social sciences. The thesis of economic determinism arises because of a failure to set and distinguish clearly the object of, and proper methods to be used in the study of, social formations; and part of it can be traced to the amphibological nature of the conceptual tools of social science. We will reconstruct the problematic of the social sciences, and that of Marx in the particular regions that are vital to our interests and show that within the Marxian framework the so-called problem is meaningless.

In its most vulgar form the thesis argues that men's behaviour, their ideas and actions are caused by economic forces; or again that men are actuated by economic considerations. Pushed to extremes it becomes absurd and states that "the way I think is determined by how much money I have in my pockets". This is how Von Mises states it: "Marxism asserts that a man's thinking is determined by his class affiliation"^{*1}, and as if to refute the theory, a few pages later he goes on, sneeringly, that this greatest of all proletarian leaders was a bona fide product of the bourgeoisie; and we assume, therefore he cannot have thought the way he did; therefore Marx was not a Marxist^{**}.

* All references to be found at the end of this thesis.

** One day in reply to a query by a friend, referring to the abuses that some "Marxists" made of his theories, Marx exclaimed

According to this thesis we can deduce the contents of men's minds, predict their actions etc., from the simple knowledge of the position they occupy within the economic structure of a given society, the implication being that the various structures of social production, such as the production of art, theory etc., are mere appendages derived from the economic structures; they are co-terminous and co-present with each other, being mere reflections of this basis and the correspondence between them being rigorous, in the form of one-to-one relationships existing between the various structures.

A slightly different version of this thesis is widely held in social science, especially by economists, while the terms that it connects are somewhat more specific. For instance, L. Robbins writes that "all changes in social institutions are the result of changes in the techniques of production. History is the epiphenomenon of technical change. The history of tools is the history of mankind"². It is true that in isolation some of Marx's statements are misleading. The famous statement from Poverty of Philosophy to the effect that "The hand-mill gives rise to the feudal lord; the steam-mill gives rise to the industrial capitalist"³, conveys the image of a man who believed

half in jest, half seriously: "At least, I, am not a Marxist". We may well imagine Von-Mises--had he been aware of the incident--quoting the phrase and thereby proving indubitably both the correctness of his theses on Marx and at the same time showing that the latter's writings are nothing but a tissue of contradictions, because one cannot be both right and wrong at the same time, about the same thing. This is a fair picture of the absurdities we are lead into when we apply those forms of thought, consistently.

in the existence of mechanical connections between the various aspects of social existence. But if we want to make sense of this, and similar declarations, they must be understood against the general background of the whole corpus of Marx's works. His opponents are too happy to seize on such occasions to cheaply refute a view of which they do not understand a thing.

Robbins gives a quite standard account of economic determinism and such statements could be multiplied ad infinitum. We may note in passing that "history" which seems to mean here "social development", is nowhere defined by Robbins, never thematized as such, never taken as an object of reflexion. It is assumed or given; ultimately it is simply the way things move in time, and implies a conception of social time, not shared by Marx, which reduces all the determinations of time to simple and pure succession, one phase of time giving rise to the next, in very much the same fashion as the self-development of the Hegelian Concept engendering itself through the mechanism of the aufhebung.

Robbins' understanding of Marxism shows very well the mechanism which silently operates in the thesis of economic determinism. History is a mere epiphenomenon, understood as the self-development of a simple generative unity, with the economic sphere coming to occupy the whole scene of history reducing all other manifestations of human activity to the status of mere phenomenon to which economics is related as to its essence. This is a familiar theme, the cornerstone of Hegel's dialectic. We will return to this theme later. In

this model the real sense of human development is to be found in the economic activities of man, the economic possessing within itself sense and finality. Thus we have a "distention" of the sphere of economics and the drainage of every other sphere of human activity; the religious, political, theoretical etc. aspects of social production are mere passive elements, ornaments at the most.

It is important to reconstruct the problematic of economic determinism and confront it with the actual Marxian theory of society. If we analyse the objects, the terms and the "relators", i.e. the types of relations called forth by the thesis, in other words the concepts that it sets to work and within which it conceives or misconceives the problems involved, it is obvious that there is no correspondence between the two problematics, that none of this theoretical apparatus is to be found within the Marxian theory of society.

The concepts set up in the thesis of economic determinism can be classified into three groups representing three sets of interrelated problems. These concepts are not even distinguished by social science, not because of a failure of perception, but because of certain built-in methodological assumptions. We will uncover those assumptions and give the specific differences of method and object which are the themes of Marx's reflexions.

1) There is the question of the economic object, or the nature of economic phenomena. What do we include within the sphere of

CHAPTER I

ECONOMIC DETERMINISM: A PROBLEM?

It is men who make their history, but not in arbitrary fashion, not in conditions chosen by themselves, but in conditions directly given and inherited from the past.

K. Marx

It is often said that Marx is an economic determinist. This thesis is never very clearly formulated by those who accuse Marx of this unforgivable sin, its terms never clearly defined. This is understandable because, and it is our contention, such a thesis cannot be articulated at all for the elements it tries to relate are by essence unrelatable.

The thesis is attributed to Marx on the basis of innumerable confusions existing within the very conceptual structure of the social sciences, which confusions are often projected on to the Marxian view of society. For the same reason social science is unable to appreciate the radically new, in fact revolutionary, method of analysis that the architecture of Capital exhibits. It is the failure to understand this method, combined with the inertia of traditional forms of thought, which is responsible for this "aberration of the mind" as Gramsci calls it.

"economics", what is the meaning of the term, what criteria do we use for mapping out this field of study?

2) There is the question of the nature of the social totality. What are the relationships existing between the various spheres of social existence? How is economics related to art, politics, religion etc? What notion of social totality does the Marxian model imply? What is the notion of social totality implied in the thesis of economic determinism? What is the problematic or underlying conceptual structure used in each model?

3) Lastly, there is the important question of determination. Economic determinism maintains that economics "causes" attitudes, behaviour, ideas; that technology changes tastes, or causes political regimes to fall, or sets societies in motion. Once more we note the wide variety and logical disparity of terms related by the causal model; technology and tastes are lined up and the one derived from the other; or various properties of social systems are identified and causal links postulated between for instance, size of GNP and population. In contradistinction, the classical notion of causality plays a very subordinate role in the architecture of Capital, and we shall see that the relations between the various properties of systems, are not causal connections, but are thought of in terms of structures. Efficacy is conceived in terms of specific combinations existing between the different elements within a structure, and in terms of the specific combination of structures, economic, political, religious, characterizing a given social formation. This efficacy is expressed in terms of correspondences and contradic-

tions or limits, emerging within or between the different structures. This is the crucial concept of structural determination.

What is taken as the classical statement of economic determinism "takes the following form"^{*}:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society--the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness⁴.

Marx calls this the "general conclusion at which I arrived"⁵. Our task is to retrace some of the steps that led him up to the formulation of his "general conclusion", by the analysis of the terms involved in the statement, e.g. "relations of production", "society", "determines", and the connections postulated between these terms, e.g. the "economic structure" as related to the "superstructures", the "mode of production" as related to "social, political and spiritual processes".

^{*} Quoting this passage, Herskovits writes: "The most precise statement of Marx's position [which he calls economic determinism] is to be found in the preface to his Critique of Political Economy, where it takes the following form:"⁶.

Here we find all the elements present in the three categories we distinguished before: 1) the economic object, that which Marx calls "relations of production" or the economic structure of society, which at another level of theory (history) he designated by the expression "mode of production", 2) the model of social totality and the relations existing between the various spheres or structures of society, 3) the concept of determination which accounts for the correspondences and contradictions between the various structures; at another level it is the crucial concept of a theory of history; it is the concept which permits us to "conceive" and "theorize" social change.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF ECONOMIC PHENOMENA

A) THE OBJECT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

All science would be superfluous if the appearance and essence of things were identical.

Capital

The belief that Marx is an economic determinist may be related to the very conception of economics held in the social sciences. A brief survey of the literature dealing with the object of economics as defined in the classical texts of economic science, economic anthropology and political economy, casts a revealing light on the nature of the objects studied in those different sciences, and gives us a key to the wholesale misinterpretations that Marxian theory has suffered.

The major characteristic of what, following the classical Marxist terminology, we shall call "bourgeois social science", is that its subject matter is cut out of the field of "facts" to which the index of "evidence" is attached. Its objects are those of common-sense perception, objects which are immediately observable as they offer themselves to the naked eye; then, comes the task of organizing those "appearances" into a system. The obvious result is that science is converted into apology since its task is limited to the

phenomenal description of what already is, while explanation is given up in favor of unrestrained ideological opposition and conflict. The argument given in favor of this attitude goes roughly like this: given that natural science has made such rapid progress it is because it confined itself to the sphere of facts, of "observables", and measurable data; ergo, if progress is to be had in the social sciences we should observe the same general rule. The argument is spurious: first, it is safe to assume that the object of the social sciences is of a different nature than that of the natural sciences; if such is the case it is more than doubtful that the same general rules are equally valid in both spheres; secondly, it is not true that natural science confines itself to "observables"; it uses theoretical constructs whose validity is measured in terms of the function they perform within a given theoretical structure, i.e. in terms of the range of data such hypothetical constructs permit to explain.

It should be stressed right from the start that the object of bourgeois social science--and we shall have ample opportunity to verify this contention--is the object of commonplace experience^{*}, that is, it admits only such objects within its theoretical framework. This methodological injunction is related to the positivist notion which

* This statement should actually be qualified. Social science claims to remain at this level, but in the process of theoretical production (?), it in fact, surreptitiously introduces models, and operates with structural concepts, sans le savoir--though they may suspect it. See K. Mills, The Structure of Change. See also M. Godelier, Rationalité et Irrationalité en Economie, pp. 20-21.

confuses explanation with description. According to this trend of positivism, explanation has no ontological status. It is an empty concept and theoretical entities are merely a shorthand way of describing phenomena. Without launching into an exhaustive analysis of the status of "explanation" in science, it should be possible to establish a few points.

In his essay, *Phenomenological Theories*, Mario Bunge deals with the question. He compares scientific theories to boxes with external manipulable dials. "The dials correspond to the 'external' variables representing observable properties, such as size and direction of motion of visible bodies; the pieces inside the box correspond to the 'internal' or hypothetical variables, such as elastic strain and atomic weight. If, in order to run the box, only the dials have to be manipulated, we have a black box theory--a handy name coined by electrical engineers to describe the dealings with certain systems, such as transformers or resonant cavities, as if they were units devoid of structure. If in addition to the handling of dials representing the external variables, we are required to meddle with a hypothetical inner mechanism described with the help of 'internal' variables (hypothetical constructs), we are confronted with what may be called a translucid box theory"¹. On this model bourgeois social science consists largely of black box theories, which are limited to the description of the behaviour aspects of given social systems. For instance, if a sociologist wishes to find out if country X is a democracy, he goes out and checks if there are two parties (or three for

that matter), and if the population votes every four years (or three for that matter). If so, then country X is a place where "democracy" is a living reality.

The implicit claim of bourgeois social science, is that black-boxism or the systematization "of directly observable phenomena" is the "sole aim of scientific theorizing" (p. 253). But, as Bunge explains, "The history of factual science can be construed as a sequence of transitions from black box to translucent box theories notwithstanding a few occasional reversals of that main trend"². When adhered to closely black-boxism does not simply offer limitations, but puts brakes on the development of science, not to mention the nefarious consequences which ensue when such theories are applied to practical problems such as under-development. The black box model is portrayed in the following equation: $O = M I$, where 'I' designates the input (observable properties Y, of society X), and 'O' stands for output (observable property A, of society X), while 'M' designates the properties or inner mechanism of the box (society X). In a black box theory 'M' is left unspecified. Whenever certain results are expected we manipulate the input dials, e.g. pumping capital into under-developed countries, and expect concomitant outputs, e.g. X economic growth per capita. But, if in the first place 'M', that is the structure of say, a given South American Republic, has been inadequately described, no amount of fiddling with the inputs will ever give the desired outputs, e.g., economic growth.

To begin our analysis let us examine two sets of definitions on the

nature of economics: Group A is used in neo-classical economic science, while Group B is characteristic of contemporary Political economy. One of the most influential theoreticians representative of Group A, L. Robbins, defines economics as the science "which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses"³. This definition which Robbins calls the "analytical definition" is adopted by Herskovits⁴, Firth⁵, and Burling⁶; they are followed in this by most marginalists, e.g. Samuelson, and some "Marxists" dangerously flirt with the concepts involved in the definition--O. Lange⁷ (see below, p. 17). According to Robbins any form of behaviour which combines scarce means in view of securing a determined end is by definition economical. R. Burling pushing the thesis to its logical extremes declares:

There are no specific economic techniques or economic goals. It is only the relationship between ends and means, the way in which a man manipulates his technical resources (emphasis added) to achieve his goals, that is economic. ... If all behaviour involving allocation is economic, then the relationship of a mother to her baby is just as much an economic one, or rather has just as much of an economic aspect, as the relationship of an employer to his hired laborer⁸.

Logically Burling is lead to see in Freud's theory of the pleasure principle an expression of this basic economic fact of maximization of scarce means in view of reaching certain goals; in the same way does

he conceive Lasswell's theory of power or Zipf's essay on the principle of least effort. Just as economic man maximizes profit, Freudian man maximizes pleasure, Lasswellean man maximizes power.

Before analysing the full implications of this view we may point out the role played by the amphibologies, if not outright contradictions, contained in the definition. The word "technical" harbours such an extension that it dissolves into meaninglessness. If we remain faithful to Burling's intuition we have to include under the term "technique" such acts as feeding the baby, going to the bathroom or Marek Jablonski giving a concert; because all these forms of behaviour involve manipulation of such resources as muscles, brains, sensitivity in order to reach certain goals viz., satisfaction of the baby's needs, relief of the body, the execution of a concerto. Let Burling himself express fully the absurdity of his thesis:

The woman organizing her housework, the man allocating his time between his family and his club, the child deciding whether to play baseball or fly a kite ... are making economic decisions whether or not money has anything to do with their choice, and whether or not they are dealing with "material" objects⁹.

The analytical definition uses as a criterion for the economic aspect of any form of action a general and formal property of human activity. If any form of action exhibits a logic which secures its optimal use, then it is economic. From the flat observation that anything needs time to perform, and involves choice, it is sufficient to characterize it as economic. This way everything becomes economic, which means that in fact nothing remains so. If such is the case, any and every

explanation of human behaviour becomes an economic explanation:

It should be possible to speak of the supply of prestige, the demand for power, and the cost of authority. I see no reason why one should not even speak of the marginal utility of loving care. Each man can be regarded as an entrepreneur, manipulating those around him, trading his products of labor, attention, respect etc. for the most he can get in return¹⁰.

The distention of economic categories permits him to subsume all social relations under a single set of categories, such that the economic sphere absorbs and explains the whole of social existence. The only question which remains problematical for Burling is the difficulty of quantifying those realities; short of that, tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes --- économique. His conception of the ideal society is undoubtedly one based on a market economy, a vast market where consumers could barter five ounces of loving care (not shampoo) for three shovels, two grains of brains for fifteen hours of attention etc.*

The same general theory of human behaviour leads R. Firth to assert in his Elements of Social Organization: "In this sense a marriage has an economic aspect in all the decisions and relations of daily life, --- quite apart from the exchanges of goods and services that may go on"¹¹. A few lines below we come across the same

* This is not intended as a caricature of Burling's theses, but seems more like the awful truth if we take his theory to its logical conclusions.

distention of economic categories, but here economics includes the whole sphere of human relations. "In this sense relations between persons in virtue of their association in the production or exchange of these goods and services are 'economic' relations"¹². The notion of exchange which plays a very specific theoretical role in economics is distended and covers the whole sphere of human action; from economics we easily slip into a general theory of human behaviour, a general anthropology which becomes the foundation for the study of economics.

Before looking at the status of this anthropology which gives economics its facts, what is the theoretical status of the definition? The definition does not allow us to map out the field of economic realities, and much less conceive its relationship to the political, the religious, morals, philosophy etc. The economist P. Massé underlines the unscientific character of the definition in his Operational Research in Practice:

M. T. Koopmans has defined the activity of production as the "best utilization of limited means in view of reaching desired goals". No matter how different our respective goals, it seems to me that this definition could apply as well to military strategy¹³.

The formal principle of action subsumes everything under a general theory of human behaviour, called the science of praxeology by Von Mises. As a result the analytical definition is powerless to even delimit its own field of study, or circumscribe its object. Economics is the pot-pourri in which everything can be included: means,

cattle, freedom, love, shovels, markets, wages, Renoirs and even philosophy. In the words of Godelier, it then becomes impossible "to distinguish the economic activity, from activity oriented towards the search for pleasure, power, or salvation"¹⁴.

Although the definitions of contemporary Political economy, Group B, differ greatly in appearance from those given above, we will see that they derive from a common well of intuition. In the Dictionnaire Philosophique de Lalande, Political economy is defined as "the science whose object is the knowledge of phenomena ... and the determination of laws concerning the distribution of wealth, its production and consumption, in so far as these phenomena are related to distribution. The technical usage of the term wealth refers to everything that is susceptible of utilization" (Vol. I, p. 187). On page 188, Lalande quotes Simiand: "What characterizes a phenomenon as economical? Instead of defining this phenomenon by the consideration of wealth ... it seems to me preferable to follow recent economists, who take as their central notion the satisfaction of material needs"*.

Once more we see from the first definition that bourgeois Poli-

* A "Marxist" economist, the Polish theoretician O. Lange gives a similar definition of Political economy: "Political economy is concerned with the social laws of production and distribution. It deals with the social laws of the production of goods and their distribution to the consumers, i.e. to those who use the goods to satisfy their individual or collective needs" (p. 7). The definition is improved but shares the same fundamental structure as the ones given above. Moreover, Lange believes that all social laws (see below, the chapter on Structural Determination) are reducible to causal laws.

tical economy takes within its field of study the universe of facts, i.e. wealth, or use-values. Thus on the first level its field of study consists of quantifiable and measurable objects only. Those facts are given and immediately observable. The thesis finds its credentials and philosophical legitimacy in the theory of Operationalism. Without going into the details of the epistemological validity of operationalism, we can get an idea of what is involved by looking at the practice of operationalists. If an economist, (although they usually leave the job to sociologists and political scientists), wants to find out the class composition of a given society he builds up his concept around income. All those persons who find themselves within a certain income bracket are classified as working-class; those who earn X dollars more are classified as middle-class and so on. Consequently anything that is not quantifiable is rejected as metaphysical, historicist or Marxist.

The second definition seems at odds with the first one. But we shall see that this is so only on a superficial level. In fact they share the same structure. According to Simiand, what belongs to the sphere of economics are all those activities involving the satisfaction of material needs. If this is right, then going to a concert does not carry any economic implications - unless one wished to argue that going to a concert comes under the determination "satisfaction of material needs". Yet, a concert involves certain operations that have an unmistakably economic character; whether I choose to buy a car or a season ticket at the Metropolitan, regard-

less of the reasons that may motivate my choice, affects in a specific manner the disposal of material resources. This reality surely resists being characterized as non-economic and yet the definition leaves out of account the important region of services. But those are obvious shortcomings; we want to get at the structure of the definition.

The "distribution of wealth" and the "satisfaction of material needs" are equivalent to all purposes^{*}, except that the first definition includes the sphere of services. What is the common fount from which they fetch their objects? We noted that from all appearances bourgeois social science cuts its facts out of an empirical field, out of the space of the given; its data are immediately accessible to direct observation. Such are the categories of the political economist. His objects of reflexion are wages, rent, profit, interest, salary etc., all sensible realities. On a second level behind the region of facts, we find the source which feeds economics. That source is the same that fed the first group (A) of definitions. Behind the veil we see the shadows of the same general anthropology which served as the foundation for Robbins' definition. The field of facts and data implies a relationship to the world of men who produce, distribute and consume, i.e. economic phenomena are related to the satisfaction of material needs, thus to human subjects who are the definers of the

^{*}Simiand seems to be mistaken as to the novel character of his views. The definition simply brings out more clearly the theoretical role played by the "economic subject", while emphasizing the explicit nature of anthropological categories.

field of economics^{*}. Via a different route we fall into the same theoretical incapacities built into the "analytical" definition. Economic phenomena are conceivable only on the condition of a general anthropology which grounds in human subjects and their needs - or human behaviour and action - all acts whereby economic objects are produced, distributed and consumed. The homo oeconomicus becomes the ultimate foundation of the science. This putative construct is a gratuitous hypothesis and functions as a universal dator; it works as an ad hoc hypothesis, some sort of Deus ex machina which is introduced whenever one is at a loss for an explanation. The main characteristic of the homo oeconomicus is that ultimately it is also a datum, visible, observable. This vague concept determines the nature of economic phenomena; in one case it is need, in the other case, behaviour; they constitute the absolute field against which economic phenomena are thematized.

B) THE OBJECT OF DAS KAPITAL

That none of this theoretical apparatus belongs to Marx is made

* Marx talks about human subjects and behaviour, but it is behaviour as thematized by a structure: "To prevent a possible misunderstanding, a word. I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense couleur de rose. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, bearers of particular class-relations and class-interests"¹⁵. Lest anyone use the statement as proof that Marx was inhuman or did not care for individuals, it may be useful to comment that he is simply attempting to define a field of objectivity, the field of science.

clear from the first line of the Introduction. "The subject matter of our discussion is first of all material production by individuals as determined by society, naturally constitutes the starting point (sic)*. The individual and isolated hunter or fisher who forms the starting point with Smith and Ricardo, belongs to the insipid illusions of the eighteenth century"¹⁶. The analysis here moves on a different level. How does Marx characterize the sphere of economics? What is this "material production of individuals as determined by society"? What is the place of anthropological concepts in his theoretical structure and characterization of economics?

To answer these questions let us briefly describe the main features of the field mapped out by Marx. The first characteristic of economics is that it is a system, which precludes any simple, empiricist conception of the science. In a text, clear as the dawn, Marx debars any simple-minded conception of the business of science:

It seems to be the correct procedure to commence with the real and concrete aspects of conditions as they are; ... yet, on closer consideration it proves to be wrong. ... The latter is manifestly the scientifically correct method. [The method which starts with the abstract and moves to the concrete.] The concrete is concrete, because it is a combination of many objects with different destinations**, i.e. a unity of diverse elements. In our thought, it there-

* The translation seems to have omitted a word. By supplying the pronoun "which", after the word "society", the integral sense of the sentence appears to be restored.

** The English translation carries the word "destinations" which is misleading. The French edition uses the more accurate term "déterminations".

fore appears as a process of synthesis, as a result, and not as a starting point, although it is the real starting point and therefore, also the starting point of observation and conception¹⁷.

What science produces are theoretical variables, abstractions, and models. "Economics" is one of these realities that are not directly accessible to immediate observation. The economic field has to be mapped out by means of theoretical terms, not all of which can be cashed in terms of observables. And signifying his break with Hegel: "it is not the process (emphasis added) which itself generates the concrete", but the concrete is the result of a "real act of production"¹⁸. In other words, economics has the shape of a structure, and to use Bunge's expression, the box is translucent.

Before following the path traced by Marx, let us establish a few methodological points. A system is composed of structures; structures are composed of elements or "objects" related in a specific way. The terms within a structure are determined by the particular combination of elements within that structure. A system receives its determination from a specific combination and articulation of the structures involved in its composition. It is thus possible to talk of the structure of a system without lapsing into meaninglessness; it signifies the particular properties that characterize a given formation, whether it be a social, economic or theoretical formation. An economic system--at least this is so in the case of the capitalist mode of production, whether we could generalize to all modes of production, is a question that could be decided only through concrete historical

and socio-anthropological studies--is made up of two structures 1) the relations of production, 2) the labour-process. Those are the determining factors of economic life, not an a priori structure of needs, or a formal property of behaviour. We will verify this proposition later in the case of a specific example in the chapter on Structural Determination and show how the structure of needs is determined by the structure of the mode of production; not caused by, or derived from, but how the mode of production sets limits to human needs. Right now let us set up the concept of mode of production as understood by Marx to be the proper object of economics*.

A mode of production is composed of three structures: 1) the structures of production, 2) the structures of distribution, 3) the structures of consumption. The first part of the Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy sets out to plot the relationships existing between these different structures. It is made clear that those three spheres are not "self-contained, independent" spheres (p. 276), while the primacy of production is plainly asserted.

1) PRODUCTION

Production includes two inseparable elements or structures: A) the

* "It is not mere venality if we introduce those terms with some measure of staging, because it would be perfectly false to believe that they are "given" and evident; on the contrary they are produced by Marx, and so far from being evident that their usage in "effective" sociological analyses meets with the greatest difficulties. This explains why they are called paradoxical, heteroclit, incoherent, or we assimilate them without any further hearing to other terms: technique, economics, institutions, human relations etc."19

labour-process whereby man changes nature into useful products or use-values through the expenditure of labour-power, B) the social relations of production which determine the place and function of the agents of production in a given economic system.

A) the labour-process

The labour-process is concerned with the analysis of the material and technical conditions of production. "The elementary factors of the labour-process are 1, the personal activity of man, i.e. work itself, 2, the subject of that work, and 3, its instruments"²⁰. Out of this combination of factors there emerge two essential characteristics of the labour-process, a) the material character of the conditions under which the labour-process is carried out and, b) the dominant role of the means of production in the determination of the labour-process.

a) material conditions of the labour-process:

The labour-process presupposes the existence of material conditions which can be reduced to the existence of nature, raw or modified by human activity; "it is the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and nature; it is the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and therefore is independent of every social phase of that existence, or rather, is common to every such phase"²¹. The determination of the labour-process by its material conditions precludes any anthropological conception of labour as pure creation, as the essence of man^{*}. Whereas in the

* Reference on following page.

Manuscripts of 1844 labour is conceived--as in the good old Hegelian tradition--as an ontological attribute of man, in Das Kapital, the specific, i.e. material and historical, conditions under which labour is undertaken become the theme of reflexion. Then, what is determinant of the labour-process is not some essential characteristic belonging to man the subject of production, but the "economic" distinctions made by Marx between constant and variable capital, and Sectors I and II of production; constant capital being the sum total of means of production and raw materials necessary for the production of a given article; variable capital being the part of capital reserved for wages; Sector I reproduces the conditions of production for the "conditions of production are also those of reproduction", which is the part of products reconverted "into means of production"²². Sector II is concerned with the production of objects for individual consumption.

* Rancière's essay Le Concept de Critique et la Critique de l'Economie Politique des "Manuscrits" de 1844 au "Capital", in Lire le Capital I, makes clear that Marx in Capital gave up his former idealism of labour as pure creation, as the creation (production) of man in the process of economic production (note the amphibologies). Contrast these two statements from Capital I: "We see, then, that labour is not the only source of material wealth, of use-values produced by labour. As William Petty puts it, labour is its father and the earth its mother". (p. 43); and the Manuscripts: "The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces and the more his production increases in power and extent. ... Labor does not only create goods; it also produces itself and the worker ... (emphasis added)²³. In the Manuscripts the entrepreneur is the "eunuch" who "flatters his tyrant" (his customers), and tries to "stimulate his jaded appetite, in order ... to acquire a few silver coins or to charm the gold from the purse of his dearly beloved neighbor" (p. 141). In capital, the entrepreneur is a member of the capitalist class, the "bearer of class-relations and class-interests", (Capital I, p. 10).

b) the role of the means of production

Out of the combination of the three factors mentioned above, the instruments or means of production play the dominant role:

The use and fabrication of instruments of labour, ... is specifically characteristic of the human labour-process. ... Relics of bygone instruments of labour possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economic forms of society, as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals. It is not the articles made, but how they are made, and by what instruments, that enables us to distinguish different economic epochs (emphasis added). Instruments not only supply a standard of the degree of development to which human labour has attained, but they are also indicators (emphasis added) of the social conditions under which that labour is carried on²⁴.

Thus the means of production determine the specific form of the labour-process. By determining the way in which men organize in their social production, they set the degree of productivity of labour, they determine the mode of production. The mode of production is the essential concept of a theory of history since "it enables us to distinguish different economic epochs".

B) the relations of production

The second structure of production, irreducible to the first, is the relations of production. After setting down the material conditions of production, we must analyse the social conditions of the process of production. What are those relations? It is important to note that they are not simply relations between human beings, relations in a

purely existential sense, but they are relations between the agents of production in terms of the relations existing between those agents on one side, and the material conditions of production on the other. Thus we are not dealing simply with intersubjective relationships, but with social relationships in so far as they are mediated by the specific context of material production.

In the Introduction, Marx gives the specific nature of those relationships which are conceived as a distribution of society's members in different classes:

In the most shallow conception of distribution, the latter appears as a distribution of products and to that extent as further removed from and quasi-independent of production. But before distribution means distribution of products, it is first, a distribution of the means of production and second, what is practically another wording of the same fact*, it is a distribution of the members of society among the various kinds of production (the subjection of individuals to certain conditions of production). The distribution of products is manifestly a result of this distribution, which is bound up with the process of production and determines the very organization of the latter. To treat of production apart from the distribution which is comprised in it is plainly an idle abstraction. Conversely, we know the character of the distribution of products the moment we are given the nature of that other distribution which forms originally a factor of production²⁵.

This analysis is often referred to as the class analysis of society; we

* The French translation reads instead of: "what is practically another wording of the same fact", "ce qui est une autre détermination du même rapport"; it can be translated more precisely as "what is another determination of the same relation".

see that something altogether different is involved than the mere observation that society is composed of different groups standing at a different level in the income scale, opposed in irreducible conflict. This conflict cannot be conceived either in the Hegelian fashion of a struggle of consciousnesses for recognition, in which the conflicting terms pass into each other, the master becoming the slave, while in the process the slave is transformed into master of the master. No such understanding is possible in this framework; "the identity of contraries" which is one of the essential mechanisms of Hegel's dialectic never figures as a methodological tool in Marx. That opposition and conflict receives its particular determination from the character of the mode of production, from the specific combination of production relationships that obtain in a given society at a given time.

An important text of Capital fixes the nature of the reality we are dealing with:

Whatever the social forms of production may be, the workers and the means of production always remain its factors. But the former and the latter are only virtual factors, as long as they remain separated. For a given production, their combination is required. It is the special manner in which this combination is effected which distinguishes the different economic epochs which the social structure traversed*²⁶.

We have the elements essential to the characterization of the struc-

* This statement goes far beyond a simple characterization of the capitalist mode of production. It elaborates a concept essential to the Marxian theory of history and lays down a methodological rule.

tures of production. It is a specific combination of those factors, the agents of production and the means of production, or to give the latter a more precise designation, a given level of development of the productive forces that make up the structures of production.

2) DISTRIBUTION

We already noted in the passage from the Introduction the close relationship in which distribution stands to production (see above, p. 27.)

It is not only a distribution of products and income (in which case we are referred to the relations of production), but it is as well and primarily a distribution of use-values produced in the process of production. Those use-values include the products of Sector I, the means of production, as well as those of Sector II, the means of consumption, which are exchanged for income. The products of Sector I are exchanged between the owners of the means of production, they are the members of the capitalist class. In both cases we see that production determines the structures of distribution. First in the distribution of consumers goods which is fixed by income, which depends in turn on the class structures of society or the relations of production, which is one of the essential structures of production. This in turn is an aspect of the distribution of the means of production between the different members of society, as between those who own the means of production, the capitalist class, and those who sell their labour-power in order to subsist, the proletariat.

3) CONSUMPTION

The same duality created by the very nature of production in the structures of distribution, is repeated here in the structures of consumption. It includes individual consumption, but at the same time what Marx calls productive consumption. A whole portion of consumption is thus directly related to production itself, for it includes all the instruments of labour, as well as the objects of labour (raw materials etc.) which are part of Sector I of production. The most important segment of the wealth produced in a given society is therefore not geared towards individual consumption, to the satisfaction of needs, but oriented towards productive consumption:

The individual produces a certain article and turns it again into himself by consuming it; but he returns as a productive and a self-reproducing individual. Consumption thus appears as a factor of production²⁷.

Thus, we see how the main structures of an economic system are related, and why production plays the determinant role in economic life.

This analysis may explain what the fuss is all about, namely what a lot of people usually called "revolutionaries" are trying to do when they say, in a phrase that sounds so cryptic to the pure ears of suburban dwellers, that their aim is to set up new relations of production in a given society, like some odd, suspicious characters called "Viet-Cong", are trying to do in this "obscure" little country called Viet Nam.

Now that we have set the elements that make up the structures of

production, we can give a definition of this key notion, the mode of production, which is the object of Capital. A mode of production is a structure which combines "in a special manner" such elements as labour-power, instruments of production, direct producers, owners of the means of production, objects of production.

The "special manner" in which those elements are combined always occurs at a specific time, in a specific place, which explains why Marx constantly refers to history. But at the same time history is not a magical operator, perhaps to the disappointment of Karl Popper^{*}. According to Popper and some orthodox "Marxists", time would have some special virtue of engendering of itself the numerous determinations of the social structure. Again, this conception of time is much closer to Hegel's, but has nothing to do with Marx.

The analysis we have just sketched was not intended to provide an exhaustive characterization of the capitalist system of production; we simply tried to recreate the field which Marx sets out to study, and to situate the concepts he sets to work in the study of this field. In the process we have arrived at the following:

- 1) that Marx's analysis and the concepts he uses are radically differ-

*The reference is to Karl Popper's Poverty of Historicism, supposedly in reply to Marx's Poverty of Philosophy; the book is filled with statements about Marx's historicism, but no attempt is made to analyse this so-called historicism: it is simply asserted and we get the feeling that if Marx was no historicist, then he should have been. The position that Popper builds up, "historicism" as he conceives it, should rightly incur his wrath, but unfortunately this has nothing to do with Marx - at least not the Marx of Das Kapital.

ent from those which either are used in the bourgeois social sciences, or those which are falsely attributed to him by the tenants of economic determinism. This difference holds in the questions: how are economic phenomena determined?, whence do they receive their character?, and how is this character portrayed? We have seen that the advocates of economic determinism and many social scientists operate with anthropological concepts from which economic categories are derived. We have seen equally what difficulties beset those attempts. In Marx's analysis on the contrary, economic phenomena are structurally determined, by the field which our analysis circumscribed, 2) we have situated "economics"* in the Marxian view of the social whole; thus we have a prefiguration of the place occupied by the mode of production in the total context of social practice.

Now we can appreciate the radical difference in the object of economics as conceived by Marx, and the "same" object as understood by bourgeois social science. Not only do we see a difference of object but the methods stand at opposite poles. The problematic of the bourgeois social sciences constitutes itself around the concepts of choice, means,

* The reason for the scare quotes was given partly by Balibar in a text quoted previously (see above, p. 23). "Economics" has a quite different meaning in Marx than the same term has in modern textbooks of economics. In the latter there is always an implicit reference to facts, realities that can be isolated and quantified or that can be characterized punctually. For Marx economics is always part of a broader framework, its meaning thematized by a general field. He talks of the "mode of producing wealth", the "way in which people organize to produce their material well-being". Economic phenomena receive their meaning from the structure of the mode of production, which in turn is determined by the broader social framework.

ends, alternatives, behaviour, and its reflexion becomes an empty reflexion on the ultimate meaning of those terms. It is not that these concepts do not have a place in Marxism, but in Marx they are transitive. For bourgeois social science, human nature is constant and possesses universal and eternal properties from which we can deduce the meaning of politics, religion, economics etc. The Marxian approach casts problems in a different order in which classical concepts are inapplicable, because inadequate to their object - because they fail to characterize the realities they attempt to grasp. We saw how. It may mean the existential plenum, but it is the epistemological vacuum.

CHAPTER III

MODEL OF THE SOCIAL TOTALITY

Or, failing this excessive simple-mindedness the temptation is to take refuge in an equally facile agnosticism which accords the same status to all phenomena.

K. Mills.

Now that we have mapped out the field of "economics", we must look into what relationship it stands to the other structures of human activity. To this effect we will reconstruct the model according to which Marx conceives this relationship; at the same time, we will contrast this model with that which he allegedly uses according to those who "believe" he is an economic determinist. We shall see that this model is the Hegelian model. Instead of sketching systematically the Hegelian notion of totality - which involves the whole of Hegel's philosophy - and giving a continuous exposition, we will circumscribe the notion by approaching it from various angles, corresponding to the various theoretical roles assigned to it in Hegel's work.

Let us start with the tacit model contained in the thesis of economic determinism. We saw that the model implies a certain relationship between the various spheres of society, and is related to a specific conception of the social totality. The social totality in this model is conceived as a unit composed of a number of spheres or

"structures" (in the loose sense of the term), in which one sphere, the economic, produces or gives rise to all other spheres of human activity, e.g. art, religion, morality, politics, law etc. Thus art, morality, politics etc. are mere reflexes or expressions of the basic economic structures. To borrow Schumpeter's phrase, economics has become the "master key to all the secrets of history". It is the very model he has in mind when talking about the so-called economic interpretation of history and the interaction which should take place between the various spheres of social existence, he writes "But the glamor of fundamental truth that surrounds it depends precisely on the strictness and simplicity of the one-way relation which it asserts"¹.

Let us bring out the fundamental implications of the model in Hegelian language: economics is the essence, while the manifold of human activities are simply phenomena; as the economic sphere unfolds and develops in time, it gives rise to the different manifestations of human experience which are simply economics in disguise; this long parade, "the cunning of economics" is merely the accompaniment of the self-development of economics, which uses these disguises in order to realize its own ends; it becomes the truth of history, the Absolute, the omega point of human development. Once reached this point, the world folds back unto itself, the breach is repaired, unity regained. It is the bliss of self-possession. C'est beau à faire trembler les philosophes; and, to quote Nat King Cole: "Your story's mighty touching, but it sounds just like a lie".

As the reader probably guessed: "it is familiar but, up-side-down!" And the statement seems perfectly sound. It seems to be exactly the reverse of the Hegelian model of society, where matter is the exact counter-part of the Hegelian Spirit. But, here instead of Reason, Economics is the key to "all the secrets of history". Instead of the Idea, we have matter, the material world, productive forces, techniques etc. In Hegel's model, society is divided into two. In the words of the Third Thesis on Feuerbach: "Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, one of which is superior to society..."²; the State or political society in which the Idea realizes itself, and the society of needs which simply figures as the means to the realization of the Absolute. Here the Idea, the State, is the essence while the material world, is conceived as pure phenomenon; in Marx the opposite would be true. The material world or economics is the essence, the motor, the internal principle of explanation of the whole sphere of reflexion and experience from religion to politics, art etc.

This scheme sounds quite convincing and certainly corresponds to the "pop" view of Marx - to give it its name. If we measure the correctness of an idea by its popularity, this one is correct beyond any doubt. Not only this, but a superficial reading of Marx may even give some "evidence" in support of this view. It may be argued: does he not say in the Preface to Capital: "My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but its direct opposite"³; "With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again"⁴. And we must admit that Marx is far from clear when it comes to his relationship to

Hegel. He has a pronounced affection for Hegelian terminology, e.g. dialectic, the negation of negation etc. but, analogy* or an isolated quote are not sufficient to say that the terms discharge the same function in the two systems under consideration, but in reverse. Sometimes Marx's vocabulary is misleading and we must look at the performance of, or function a term fulfills within a determinate problematic in order to figure out its meaning dimensions. There is no doubt that if we examine Marx carefully such simplistic explanations fall of themselves, as we already had a sidelight in the case of the master-slave dialectic.

Let us develop further the implications contained in Hegel's model. The basic element be it society, the Idea, or Subjectivity is considered as a simple generative unity, whose self-development engenders manifestations of itself, phenomenal forms, which Hegel conceives on the mode of contradictions which are to be overcome. It is the development of an in-itself into a for-itself, and the whole of its manifestations are contained in its beginning in the form of a germ⁵. Hyppolite writes: "Without this immanence of the whole to consciousness it would be impossible to understand how negation can truly engender a contents"⁶. The simple generative unity is the determining

* Schumpeter is one of the few social scientists who could raise himself above mere appearances and similarities of vocabulary, to catch a glimpse of the inner workings of Marxian dialectics. Talking about Marx's Hegelian background he chides those of his readers who seized "primarily upon this element and made it the master key to the system" (p. 9). Again: "He liked to testify to his Hegelianism and to use Hegelian vocabulary. But this is all. Nowhere did he betray positive science to metaphysics" (p. 10).

principle of the Hegelian dialectic; for instance, the guiding principle of Roman society is the abstract juridical personality; all spheres of Roman society, economics, religion, law etc., are expressions or embodiments of this one internal principle of explanation; as such they have no reality in themselves. Here we find the "simplicity" and "one-way relation" Schumpeter talks about. In this model the various spheres of human existence are denied any significance; they are "moments", expressions of the internal principle whose essence they merely reflect.

In the Hegelian model of society we see a specific conception of unity in operation. The unity is always reducible to an internal principle of action, while the differences are mere expressions of the development of this principle, such that all parts of the totality are immediate expressions of this universal principle. To use a simple example: since cars are made in capitalist society, they express the essence of this social system. The practical consequences of the model are sometimes enormous and sometimes verge on absurdity. In the 1950's blue jeans were banned in Soviet Union, not for economic reasons such as balance-of-payments deficits, but because they symbolized capitalist degeneracy. Since blue jeans are made in capitalist factories, they express the essence of capitalism, and capitalism everybody knows, is bad. Ergo, no blue jeans for Soviet teenagers.

It is hard to conceive that anybody would hold such a view, not even the most convinced and fiery enragé, especially once the implications of the thesis have been fully articulated. But is this the Marxian model of society? No. First, the terms that are related are

different from those operating in Hegel's model. What Hegel means by civil society is the world of intersubjectivity, of the struggle of consciousnesses, the world of needs as defined in classical texts of political economy. We already saw that Marx does not take this sphere as object of study and that needs are defined by a different reality, namely the concepts of forces of production and relations of production. In so far as the State is concerned, it is not the embodiment of the Idea, that which includes and summarizes the whole development of the historical process and as such stands over and above all classes; the State has become an instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the owners of the means of production. Secondly, the social totality harbours a different type of unity. It is not a unity in which the different terms evolving out of a simple unit, the essence, are negated as soon as they are posited and depassed in the process, and yet conserved as "moments" of the Spirit's perigrinations (the aufhebung). For Marx the social totality is a complex, articulated whole, in other words, it is a structure. But, not any structure; it is a structure in which some of its components occupy a predominant position, a structure in which certain genetic priorities can be observed^{*}. We saw this mechanism in operation in the structures of production.

* K. Mills, in his paper The Structure of Change, makes a similar claim, at a different level. One of the theses he attacks is the claim that "social development is nothing but a set of loosely interdependent sub-systems of change, no one of which is to be accorded genetic priority" (pp. 1-2). He identifies the element which in a social theory is to be given genetic priority, namely "the pattern of property relations" (p. 19), which we called "relations of production".

The structure of a given social formation is composed of various practices each endowed with a relative level of autonomy. Engels expressed this reality in a letter to J. Bloch, in the following manner:

The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure: political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas, also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form⁷.

This is the theory of social formations, what Herskovits calls Marx's "political philosophy", which the latter never really elaborated.

Explicit statements referring to the problem variously called social evolution, determinants of social change, are scant and widely dispersed in the works of both Marx and Engels. But that each structure of the social practice has its own rhythm of development, its own efficacy, even its own time structure is made clear by Marx. In the Introduction he writes:

It is well known that certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connection (emphasis added) with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization⁸.

Once more we must admit that some of Marx's declarations tend to be misleading, while they may have and certainly did give rise to the interpretations he has been subjected to. For instance, the German

Ideology records that: "This way morals, religion, metaphysics and everything ideological, as well as their corresponding forms of consciousness seem to lose their autonomy. They have no history, no development; but on the contrary it is men who while developing their material production ... change their consciousness"⁹. It is important to remember that in the German Ideology Marx is arguing against Hegel and the Neo-Hegelians who had elevated consciousness to the status of Absolute. As a result, he tends to overemphasize his point*. The context rectifies this first impression; morals, philosophy etc., have no history independent of the way men organize in order to provide for their means of sustenance. At the same time it is extremely important to situate the German Ideology in the total context of Marx's works. The Preface to the Contribution does precisely this; the book was written "to work out together [with Engels] the contrast between our view and the idealism of German philosophy, in fact to settle our accounts with our former philosophical conscience"¹¹. Upon learning that the book could not be published: "We abandoned the manuscript to the stinging criticism of the mice the more readily since we had accomplished our main purpose - the clearing up of the question to ourselves"^{*12}.

* Engels was well aware of the ambiguities that had "slipped" into their work, and he explains: "Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place, or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights"¹⁰.

** On the relationships between the Young and Mature Marx, see L. Althusser, Pour Marx, especially the article: Sur le Jeune Marx, pp. 47 to 83.

But while there are no punctual relations, or "direct connections" between the spheres of social development, it does not preclude the possibility of the existence of certain forms of relationship between the various structures of a given social formation:

As regards certain forms of art, as e.g., the epos, it is admitted that they can never be produced in the world-epoch making form as soon as art as such comes into existence; in other words, that in the domain of art certain important forms of it are possible only at a low stage of development. If that be true of the mutual relations of different forms of art within the domain of art itself, it is far less surprising that the same is true of the relation of art as a whole to the general development of society. The difficulty lies only in the formulation of these contradictions¹³.

This relationship is conceived by Marx under the mode of contradictions, or correspondences, as the case may be. The contradictions may be internal as between different forms of art, or external as between different structures e.g., religion and economics. The emergence of a contradiction, is the emergence of a limit signifying that a re-organization of the elements within a given structure is imminent.

The concept of "contradiction" expresses the reality that belongs to every social formation, the fact of its complexity, what may be called its structural irreducibility. Unlike the Hegelian matrix, a simple unit giving rise to processes that are pure manifestations of the essence, whose differences are a residue of the self-development of the simple process, the Marxian matrix exhibits complexity from the start. The Introduction is clear on this point: "Whenever we speak, therefore, of production, we always have in mind production at a stage of social development or production by social individuals"¹⁴. Thus,

the myth of origins is rejected in the later writings, and along with it the whole ideology of a search for a ground, an irreducible foundation, or ultimate principle of explanation.

Contradiction plays an important role in Marx. It is through the emergence and development of contradictions between various structures that Marx understands social development. Without investigating the role of this central concept, which investigation properly belongs to the theory of history, understood as the theory of the part played by each structure in shaping the evolution of societies, we will limit ourselves to specifying the nature of the Marxian totality. The Hegelian conception of development, we noted, presupposes a linear conception of time; time is a sort of melting pot, homogeneous, continuous, in which all structures are co-present to each other. Marx's conception of history owes nothing to this ideological conception of time. "What we are interested in is not the place which economic relations occupy in the historical succession of different forms of society. Still less are we interested in the order of their succession 'in idea' (Proudhon), ... We are interested in their articulated hierarchy in modern bourgeois society"¹⁵. This text makes two important points, 1) the differential nature of time characterizing each structure of the social process, 2) specifies the nature of the Marxian conception of structure: it is an articulated hierarchy with a dominant element.

This conception of "historical materialism" bears little resem-

blance to its "traditional" forms. The social totality is composed of different structures in which the structure of the mode of production is the dominant factor. Engels expresses this dominance by saying that economics is the determining factor in the "last resort"*; hence the meaning of the statement from the Contribution: "With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed"¹⁶. Economics shares with the other structures relative autonomy but at the same time it is what determines the totality in the "last resort", i.e., its efficacy changes according to the totality in which it is inserted. In a reply to objections formulated by a "German paper in America", Marx talks about the problem without really elaborating its solution:

In the estimation of that paper, my view that each special mode of production and the social relations corresponding to it, in short, that the economic structure of society, is the real basis on which the juridical and political superstructure is raised, and to which definite social forms of thought correspond; ... all this is very true for our own times, in which material interests preponderate, but not for the middle

* "According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life"¹⁷. It is interesting to note that Lange calls it the "stimulus in the last resort", (p. 37), thus conceiving it on the S-R model which is but a variant of the causal model. No wonder he falls into determinism. Lange writes: "The economic activity is the vastest domain of application of the principle of rationality where the principle first appeared, but it is not the only one. Moreover, the economic principle conquered and goes on conquering new domains of application (technique, military strategy, scientific research etc.)"¹⁸. And Godelier comments: "We are smack into 'economism'. The economic practice (thus material) is posited as the source, the matrix of all rationality" (p. 24).

ages in which Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, where politics, reigned supreme. ... This much, however is clear, that the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism played the chief part. (emphasis added)¹⁹.

The functions and the roles here have changed. Economics is determinant in the last resort, yet the political and religious structures play the chief part, have the dominant role. Therefore, there is no one exclusive model, no master key, but analysis has to be renewed ever again, according to the object of study.

In order to solve the problem posed by the question of determination in the last resort by economics, we would have to invade the domain of the theory of history, and its practical applications to concrete historical situations which is manifestly beyond the scope of this thesis^{*}. The essential point we tried to establish was the characterization of the Marxian model of society which could be defined as: a complex of structures whose articulations determine the relative efficacy of each sphere of social existence, with economics being the determining factor in the last resort.

* This problem is specifically taken up by Althusser in Pour Marx, pp. 117 - 128. He argues against Engels' formulation of the problem and shows in which ways it cannot be conceived; see also Balibar's essay, in Lire le Capital II, pp. 212 - 222. Finally, Godelier attacks the problem from various angles in Rationalité et Irrationalité en Economie: methodologically, pp., 90 - 100; in anthropological practice: pp. 266 - 279.

CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURAL DETERMINATION

In a few, but important cases, however, self-determination has been recognized as a property of all sorts of existents, not only as a quality of conscious (and preferably wealthy) humans.

M. Bunge

We shall set out to explore now, the notion of structural determination; we could see it proliferate at the margins of this thesis. Our ambition is to fix the sense of the words "determine", "determination" and cognates, as used by Marx. The definition will be formal, such that certain changes may have to be introduced in order to secure its application to various spheres. We will mention the places where such a notion could be useful. To circumscribe the meaning of the term we will use examples from the sphere of economics. Then, we will formulate the hypothesis that the notion can be applied to model the relationships between the different social practices, after the proper conversions have been made.

Traditionally, philosophy and the social sciences have used, sometimes exclusively, sometimes in combination, two sets of concepts to express genetic connections. Those were the concepts of causality and the Hegelian notion of "expression", i.e. all elements within a structure are just the expression, or external form of some internal prin-

ciple or essence. We saw in the last chapter that there is no place for this conception in the Marxian model of society. A further implication contained in the thesis of economic determinism is that Marx uses the causal model to explain and conceive relationships between events, occurrences, with economics being the sole causal agent. This is Schumpeter's "one-way relations". There is no doubt that this type of explanation is widely used in the social sciences. A whole school, functionalism, makes it the basic device in the arsenal of the social scientist.

The Polish economist O. Lange recognizes the existence of three types of laws in the social sciences:

- 1) "Causal laws are relationships in which a given event (in our case an action or act) is always followed by some other definite event, such sequence of events taking place in time"¹.
- 2) "Concomitance laws are relationships in which two or more events always occur jointly. Concomitance laws are often called structural laws since events continually occurring together form a kind of regular structure"².
- 3) "Finally there are functional laws which operate when there is a connection or relationship between events that are measurable quantitatively: these can be formulated as mathematical functions"³. But, and this is the crucial point: "Of these three kinds of laws it is the causal laws which are of fundamental importance since both concomitance and functional laws are reducible to causal laws"⁴.

The notion of causality outlined by Lange corresponds to the

Humean notion if we strip the latter of its metaphysical trappings. The three main characteristics of the principle are the following:

- 1) the cause is contiguous to its effect,
- 2) the cause always precedes the effect,
- 3) the cause and the effect are constantly conjoined.

Thus, the causal relation is the linear relation par excellence^{*}; it presupposes the absolute externality of the cause to its effect, while the latter never contains more than there is to be found in the former. Our contention, is that this model is nowhere operative in Das Kapital or the writings of the mature Marx, in so far as the connections between the various spheres of social existence are concerned. If determinism, as is so often done, is wrongly identified with universal causation, then we must say that Marx is not a determinist--at least not in that sense of the term. We may point out en passant that there is nothing reprehensible in calling Marx a determinist--he won't gyrate in his grave--provided, we know what we are talking about. Determinism, as Bunge points out, re-

* Causal thinking is omnipresent in the "Marxist" tradition. Roger Garaudy proclaims in the abstract that mecanicist materialism has lived, but when it comes to the analysis of concrete situations he keeps coming back to causal, linear explanations. Vide, Dieu est Mort. In Matérialisme Dialectique et Matérialisme Historique, Stalin writes, "If under a regime of slavery we come across specific ideas and social theories, specific opinions and political institutions, whereas under feudalism we meet different ones, and still different ones under a capitalist regime, this cannot be explained by the "nature" or by the "properties" of ideas, theories, opinions and political institutions, (emphasis added) but by the diverse conditions of the material life of society at different periods of social development". The relation between mode of production and political institutions is a causal relationship.

quires two components 1) "the genetic principle, or principle of productivity, according to which nothing can arise out of nothing or pass into nothing; and" 2) "the principle of lawfulness, stating that nothing happens in an unconditional and altogether irregular way--in short, in a lawless, arbitrary manner"⁶. In that sense determinism is not to be identified with compulsion, an idea currently held by those who cannot conceive any other type of determination but the causal one, and who promptly identify determinism with universal causation. On this view, laws do dictate behaviour. But, unless one wished to maintain that Kepler's laws force the heavenly bodies to move the way they do, one is strongly advised to reject this antiquarian piece of scholastic reasoning. In fact, this doctrine is so absurd that it does not even deserve a footnote in an effort of refutation.

What did Marx mean when he wrote that "the mode of production ... determines the general character of the social, ... etc., process..."⁷? What is, in its methodological or philosophical aspects, this type of determination? What takes the place of the causal connection? What is structural determination?

In order to specify the notion and give it a content, we will use two examples: a) the structure of needs, b) the notion of capital. These two concepts are determined by the structure of the mode of production. This kind of determination should not be confused with Taine's vague notion of determinism by the milieu and the moment, the only difference in this case being that the determining agent would be more carefully pinned down in the economic factors.

a) the structure of needs

We saw that Marx's starting point unlike that of classical or neo-classical political economy is not behaviour, or needs, or some ephemeral creature called the homo oeconomicus, but the objective conditions created by the interaction of numerous factors that have been identified and circumscribed au préalable. The structure of needs is one of those factors and its position and function is determined by the global structure of the mode of production. References to the effect that needs are not given are numerous and scattered through Marx's writings⁸. Needs in those texts are explicitly defined historically*, and we know that the mode of production is the central concept of the Marxian theory of history.

If we remember when we built up the concept of "economic system", we spoke of the structures of production, distribution and consumption, and demonstrated how those spheres are fixed by the nature of production itself. Needs are directly connected with the sphere of consumption, but consumption has a dual nature: it is individual as well as productive consumption. A large part of the total production

* Baran gives a good descriptive formulation of this concept: "Human wants are not all wholly "synthetic", ... But neither do all wants stem from man's biotic urges or from a mythical eternally unchanging "human nature": that concept is metaphysical obscurantism which flies in the face of all historical knowledge and experience. The truth is that wants of people are complex historical phenomena reflecting the dialectic interaction of their physiological requirements on the one hand, and the prevailing social and economic order on the other"⁹.

of society goes to the reproduction of the means of production. This follows from the nature of production which allots its products differentially as between Sectors I and II. It may be argued that while the products of Sector I (devoted to the reproduction of the means of production) escape anthropological determination, it is not the case for the products that are directed towards the satisfaction of the needs of individuals. Even those, Marx argues, are determined structurally,--historically, he says: "Even the number of so-called natural needs, as well as the mode of satisfying them, is an historical product"¹⁰. Thus, needs are not defined by some hypothetical eternal human nature. On the contrary, needs are susceptible of being satisfied in so far as the economic agents have the power to buy the products which the market makes available. Thus they are determined by the level of income which individuals dispose of, and by the nature of the available products, which depends on the level of development the productive forces have reached. Thus, what at the immediate level of perception seems to involve needs and use-values, in fact involves on the one hand the technical capacities of production, and on the other hand the social relations of production, which fix the distribution of income, which in turn is determined by the structures of production. Once more we see the relevance of a class analysis.

b) the notion of capital

The notion of capital constitutes another appropriate example of structural determination. Moreover, it highlights very well the methodological differences between Marx and some bourgeois social scientists. The

traditional notion of capital is that of an object, whether it be money, a horse, cattle etc. Thurnwald writes in his Economics in Primitive Communities: "It might seem strange to speak of 'capital' among primitive people. ... It occurs in two main forms: capital in plants and capital in domestic animals, especially cattle"¹¹. Again the starting point of the method is sensible objects, the hard objects of common-sense perception. The process behind this piece of reasoning is simple: analogy. Sense-perception convinces us that every society uses material objects in the process of producing wealth, therefore every society that uses things like plants or animals uses capital. The theoretical consequences of this failure to specify the notion are important. It means that the differences between societies and economic systems are blurred, such that societies presenting widely different characters are all grouped under one single concept.

Capital is not an object but a social relation: "A Negro is a Negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations. A cotton spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. It becomes capital only in certain relations. Torn from these relations it is no more capital than gold in itself is money or sugar the price of sugar"¹². Before capital comes into existence, then, a series of conditions have to be realized. First, the object must be sold and bought. This implies the existence of a commodity producing society. Secondly, the existence of money is a prerequisite, since it acts as the medium of exchange between the agents involved in the transaction. Thirdly, and this is the most important aspect of the question, a profit has to be

made in the transaction i.e., surplus-value is realized in the process. This profit can then be reinvested in the cycle of production.

Therefore, the object we are concerned with is defined from the fact of its inherence within a specific structure, in this case the structure of a commodity producing society. This apparently simple observation carries enormous practical implications, and explains a number of facts that have baffled historians, anthropologists and students of under-developed societies alike. The concept sheds light on such problems as social development, economic stagnancy, transformation of various social systems etc.

Structural determination was aptly characterized by M. Godelier, although he never calls it by this name and never works out its philosophical implications:

The impossibility of reducing the different structures of social existence to anyone among them (material or spiritual) excludes from the social sciences all simplistic, linear conceptions of causality. It seems that each type of society is characterized by a particular relation between the different social structures, and this relation grounds the specific weight of economics, kinship, politics, religion etc. This relation between social structures acts via the mediation of, and on all aspects of social existence, while it is impossible to localize its efficacy anywhere, within a specific structure. Thus, the action of the global social structure is always inserted between one event and another, such as to give each of them its dimensions, conscious or not, that is the field of its effects, intentional or not. Between a cause and an effect, we always find the sum-total of the properties of the social structure, which precludes all simplistic notions of causality¹³.

This concept is not formulated explicitly by Marx, but numerous pages

of Das Kapital testify eloquently to its presence. We saw it operate at every point of the method, in the various structures of production, and the definition of the objects within those structures. This, in our appreciation, is the meaning of the term "determination" as used in the works of maturity. We readily see that the old notion of causality disappears in so far as the terms that are connected, are not separate, distinct events--as Hume says-- but we have the presence of the structure in its "effects". Even the concepts of "cause" and "effect" are misleading when we talk of structural determination.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this perspective how should be understand the "classical statement" (p. 7 above) of "historical materialism"? To say that a mode of production determines political, religious etc. structures is not to say that one order of reality can be derived from another, or that the superstructures are caused by the economic basis, but it is to assert the existence of a relationship--correspondence or contradiction, between the various structures of the social totality. We formulate the hypothesis that the model which may most fruitfully be used to think this relation is the model the concept of which we have just sketched, namely STRUCTURAL DETERMINATION.

In The Structure of Change, we are provided with a good example of how the notion can be set to work and explain certain social facts, that otherwise would remain without explanation:

A Marxist, for example, while denying that there is a linear, unidirectional causal bond existing between macro-economic conditions and, say, the rising rate of teenage crimes of violence, may nevertheless acknowledge that there is a genetic relationship between the two. To portray this he may well introduce a hidden variable like "alienation" which itself is defined in terms of other "hidden" variables which theoretically reconstruct the pattern of relationships in that society--for example, the mode of production, the way in which surplus product is disposed of, the way in which surplus capital is realized and so on. He may assign a genetic though non-causal priority to the relations constitutive of the manner in which the society is organized to produce its means of sustenance¹.

This constitutes merely an illustration of how social or cultural objects are structurally determined by "economics in the last resort". To say that something is determined structurally is not to reintroduce by the back door the age-old notion of "necessity". Or, to say "That a thing can be explained through its determinants does not mean there is determinism, that we are compelled to act in certain ways by a mysterious force. We need some basis for our actions, otherwise they would be gratuitous; they would not even belong to us"².

To verify the hypothesis we have just formulated would require the collaboration of numerous disciplines, and exhaustive studies of various social formations, including that of the different social practices contained within a given social formation. The first prerequisite would be to effect the theoretical distinction of the objects of various social practices. It would certainly be a corrective to the poverty of so many "Marxist" theories in politics and esthetics, which reduced the superstructures to the status of simple "effects", or "reflections", pure phenomena of a common and mysterious essence hidden within the economic sphere.

Different concepts will have to be elaborated for different objects, and levels of analysis will have to be distinguished. Political superstructures for instance, will have to be carefully distinguished from "forms of social consciousness". If there is such a field as "forms of consciousness", its extension will have to be mapped out, its characteristics specified, and its relationships to different fields of social existence plotted. Some pioneering studies claiming

this model as a source of inspiration have already been published^{*}. A whole new field of investigation is open. The studies take the form of establishing different social practices, e.g. the novel, and lining up the correspondences and contradictions between the various structures of the social totality, and in our case, the novel.

That Marx never took this problem explicitly as object of study does not derogate from his achievements. That we may have to complete,--the French would say parachever--some of his insights pertains to the very nature of science. It simply confirms Dr. Castro's statement, that Marxism is a science, it must "conduct itself as a revolutionary force and not as a pseudo-revolutionary church".

* See for instance, L. Goldmann, Pour une Sociologie du Roman; and P. Macherey, Pour une Théorie de la Production Littéraire.

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